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Rejection of Claims 1-12 and 15-17 Under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a)

Claims 1-12 and 15-17 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being obvious over U.S. Patent No. 6,217,272 to Felsenhal et al. ("Felsenhal") in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,269,643 to Kodama et al. Applicants respectfully submit, however, that the combination of Felsenhal and Kodama does not teach or suggest all of the limitations recited by claim 1. This conclusion is supported by the following reasons.

Felsenhal alone does not teach or suggest engaging a first transport positioning feature of a first substrate pallet with a first transport alignment feature of a first transport mechanism, as recited by claim 1, because Felsenhal does not disclose a pallet having alignment features. Felsenhal discloses only one example of a pallet (15), and teaches that "substrates (14) may be supported by a pallet (15) or any type of substrate carrier known in the art." See Felsenhal, column 4, lines 50-51 and 55-56. Felsenhal, however, is silent regarding pallet alignment features, as recited by claim 1.

The Specification of Felsenhal includes only two additional comments regarding pallets:

Batch processing systems process an entire batch of substrate [sic] simultaneously. Substrates are either loaded in the process chamber one-by-one or they are loaded onto a pallet, which is then loaded into the process chamber. See Felsenhal, column 1, lines 63-66.

"[T]he present invention features an apparatus for simultaneously transporting and processing substrates.... The substrates may be positioned on a pallet or free standing. See Felsenhal, column 2, lines 48-51.

Thus, Felsenhal teaches that substrates can be loaded into an in-line process system with or without use of a pallet (15), but the Specification of Felsenhal does not describe pallet alignment features, as recited by claim 1.

Moreover, no figure in Felsenhal illustrates alignment features, as recited by claim 1. Felsenhal shows the pallet (15) in only one figure (i.e., FIG. 2), which does not teach the alignment features recited by claim 1. See Felsenhal, FIG. 2. Applicants respectfully submit that the Office action incorrectly asserts that Felsenhal teaches that the pallet (15) has a first transport alignment feature. See Office action, page 2, last two lines (stating that Felsenhal discloses

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“engaging a first transport positioning feature (FIG. 2, 52) of said first substrate pallet.”)

Felsenthal, however, teaches that fingers (52) are part of the first transport mechanism (40), i.e., the fingers (52) are not part of the pallet (15). See Felsenthal, column 5, lines 51-52 (stating that the “first 40...transport mechanism...includes a plurality of...fingers 52.”)

Kodama alone also does not teach or suggest engaging a first transport positioning feature of a first substrate pallet with a first transport alignment feature of a first transport mechanism, as recited by claim 1. Kodama discloses a method of transferring groups of wafers (W) from wafer carriers (1) to a wafer conveyor robot (60), but does not disclose alignment features of the wafer carrier (1). See, e.g., Kodama, Abstract, and FIG. 4. Kodama, however, teaches that wafer groups stored in wafer carriers are aligned on a predetermined straight line outside the wafer carriers. See, e.g., Kodama, column 3, lines 60-61. Thus, Kodama may suggest manual alignment of a carrier with a straight line, but does not disclose an alignment feature of the wafer carrier and an associated feature of a transport mechanism that engages with an alignment feature of the wafer carrier.

The combination of Felsenthal and Kodama does not teach or suggest all of the limitations recited by claim 1 because neither reference teaches or suggests engaging a transport positioning feature of a substrate pallet with a transport alignment feature of a transport mechanism, as recited by claim 1. Therefore, for all the above reasons, independent claim 1 is patentable over Felsenthal in view of Kodama. Because claim 1 is patentable over Felsenthal in view of Kodama, Applicants submit that claims 2-12 and 15-17, which depend directly or indirectly from claim 1, are patentable over Felsenthal in view of Kodama as well.

Objection to Claims 13 and 14

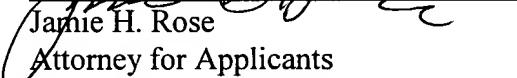
The Office action objected to claims 13 and 14 as being dependent upon a rejected base claim. In view of the above comments regarding claim 1, from which claims 13 and 14 depend, Applicants respectfully request that the objection to claims 13 and 14 be withdrawn.

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CONCLUSION

In view of the above arguments, Applicants respectfully request that the rejection of claims 1-12 and 15-17 be reconsidered and withdrawn, with claims 1-17 proceeding to issue. The Examiner is invited to call the undersigned, if the Examiner believes that a telephone conversation could be helpful in expediting prosecution of the instant application.

Respectfully submitted,


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